

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **PROJECT SAFE CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE ADDRESSES PROBLEM OF ONLINE PREDATORS**

Madison, Wisconsin – Erik C. Peterson, United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Attorney General J. B. Van Hollen opened a two-day conference in Wisconsin Dells this morning, entitled “Protecting Children from Online Predators.” The conference was also sponsored by Steven Biskupic, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Wisconsin.

This conference is a product of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the U.S. Attorneys’ Offices, Project Safe Childhood (PSC) marshals federal, state, and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. The conference is a joint effort by the U. S. Attorneys’ Offices, the U. S. Department of Justice’s Office for Victims of Crimes, the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Department of Corrections, and many other local and federal agencies.

United States Attorney Peterson said, "As technology improves and the Internet becomes more vast and accessible, the number of computer-facilitated sexual crimes against children continues to grow. According to one recent study, one in seven children (ages 10 to 17) who are regular Internet users are sexually solicited online. That translates to millions of kids, and it suggests that there are thousands of offenders whom we have not yet identified and brought to justice. Our conference this week is attended by over 400 dedicated individuals – law enforcement officers, victim advocates, probation and correction officers, attorneys, and educators. In an effort to better protect our children, we are addressing the serious problem of online predators with a team approach that involves not just law enforcement officers, but other professions as well."

Wisconsin Attorney General Van Hollen said in a prepared statement, "Project Safe Childhood is one important component of a multi-jurisdictional, comprehensive approach to attacking the problem of online sex predators. Conferences like this are an opportunity for federal, state, and local prosecutors and law enforcement to exchange information about this growing threat and to build partnerships with non law-enforcement and non-governmental organizations. Online sex predators patrol the Internet, seeking out Wisconsin's youth for victimization and trading graphic child pornography. But law enforcement patrols the Internet, too, and I am committed to working with federal and local law enforcement partners and stepping up Wisconsin's efforts to combat online sex predators."

In addition to the coordination of federal, state, and local law enforcement, the Project Safe Childhood Initiative acts to raise public awareness and to educate children and their parents on the dangers they face online. The U.S. Department of Justice, in partnership with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Ad Council, has developed a series of public service announcements to raise awareness of the dangers of online predators.

The most recent campaign targets teenage girls with the message “Think Before You Post.” In researching for these ads, the Department of Justice found that while many teens know they should exercise caution in who they talk to and what they post online, the main problem is that most teens think they already are acting safely. Teens think they can carve out a “private” space to experiment and socialize with no consequences. This mistaken belief that the Internet is a “private” place makes teen girls particularly vulnerable to sexual predators. To review the public service announcements, or to obtain further information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit [www.projectsafechildhood.gov](http://www.projectsafechildhood.gov).

Information about the Wisconsin Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force can be found at <http://www.doj.state.wi.us/dci/icac>.

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